

J676: Media Bias and Political Behavior

1:00pm-2:15pm, 4008 Vilas Hall

Spring 2014

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Office Hours: Thurs: 9:45-10:45am
and by appointment

Rathskeller Hours: W: 1:30-2:30pm
*Meetings also by appointment

TV tells a million lies, the paper's terrified to report anything that isn't handed on a presidential spoon
from "Ignoreland" by R.E.M.

For the American journalist, independence is everything
Dan Rather

We Report. You Decide.
FOX News Slogan

Stop me if you've heard this one: the media are biased.

I thought so.

But what does it mean to be biased? And if the media are biased and that bias is important because it affects how people think, act, behave, and vote, then why aren't people more alike? If media bias is so pervasive and influential, why isn't America full of mostly liberals or mostly conservatives or some other thing that "the media" want us to be?

Over the course of the next fifteen weeks, we are going to take a deep dive into what we know about bias – from a variety of perspectives – and examine how these different kinds of biases work, how they manifest themselves, and how they affect political behavior in the United States.

In this class you will:

- Learn what scholars have been able to empirically demonstrate about the presence of a variety of biases within the media *and* within us
- Develop tools to judge the quality of information you are consuming and learn to use those tools to form and update your own attitudes
- Produce a piece of original research related to issues of media bias and political behavior

Important Due Dates

Research Question: 2/11/14

Bias ID and Fix: 2/27/14

Research Design: 3/27/14

Presentations Begin: 5/1/14

Final Paper Absolute Due Date: 5/15/14

Literature Review: 2/20/14

Exam 1: 3/11/14

Exam 2: 4/24/14

Final Paper Early Due Date: 5/12/14

Grades

Attendance, Participation, In-Class Assignments: 10%
Bias Identification and Fixing: 12.5%
Bias in Real Time: 5%
Research Question: 7.5%
Literature Review: 7.5%
Research Design: 7.5%
Paper Presentation: 5%
Final Paper: 20%
Exams: 25% (12.5% each)

A=94-100 B=82-86.9 C=70-76.9 F=59.9 and below
AB=87-93.9 BC=77-81.9 D=60-69.9

Rounding up is not automatic, but based on attendance, office hour visits, and improvement.
Grades, the syllabus, the readings, and assignments are available on Learn@UW.

Attendance/Participation

Your participation grade will be based on participation in discussions, attendance, performance in short, simple, random quizzes that you and your classmates will write, and, again, the caliber (not amount!) of your regular participation discussions. If you have any questions about how you are doing, please see me, though keep in mind that I will regularly update your participation grade on Learn@UW so that you can see where you stand. Part of your grade will be determined by how well you are keeping up with current events. As such, I require you to regularly read a major newspaper for this course. Bringing examples of ways in which the news you read conforms or doesn't to what we discuss in class is a great way to participate. While I love the *Daily Cardinal* and the *Badger Herald*, they are not major newspapers. *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post* are types of acceptable examples. Additionally, I understand that everyone is not comfortable participating in class. On the one hand, college is a time for you to try new things; so I want you to try to participate. On the other hand, for some, this just isn't possible or productive. If you might fit this latter category, you must come see me by the end of the 1st week of classes to discuss alternate ways you can participate.

Tweetle-ee-deetle-ee-deet Tweet, Tweet Tweetle-ee-deet

One way to 1.) keep up with what is happening out there and 2.) engage in a form of public democratic deliberative discussion is to use social networking sites. One such site is Twitter. I have a Twitter account @prowag – you can follow me if you like, but you are certainly not required to follow me. However, one way you can participate in class is to create a Twitter account of your own and start following people and organizations that cover and comment on the news and politics. I am happy to give you suggestions. When you post, if you end your post with #J676Bias (for our course number), I will see it and give you participation credit.

You cannot get an A in Participation without using Twitter.

Exams

You will take two exams; they comprise 25% of your final grade. Exam 1 consists of 20 multiple choice questions and your choice of one of three essay questions. The questions will be drawn from the readings, lectures, and current events in the American media and politics that we discuss in class.

The exams reward you for coming to class and for keeping up on the reading. The questions will be descriptive and analytic. In other words, memorization is not enough; you will have to think about the material as well. The second exam will be of the same format and is not cumulative, generally speaking.

Do not wear hats or headphones to the exam. There is to be absolutely no talking from the time exams are handed out until they are collected. I say that not to be a jerk, but because it is just too hard to distinguish innocuous talking from cheating; not to mention that it disturbs other students. Anyone who talks (unless you're asking me a question or experiencing a medical emergency, of course) during an exam will receive a 0.

*****Makeup Policy for Exam**

I expect you to take the exam as scheduled. Should you have a verifiable medical emergency or University sanctioned activity (and can document it) I will arrange for a makeup exam. If you will need a make up exam, you must notify me **before** the exam is given or you will get a 0. Email is fine for this. Note: *All make up exams are oral.*

*****Grading Policy for Exams and Written Assignments**

Should you have a question about how something was scored and would like me to reconsider your grade, you may proceed as follows: 1) After waiting a minimum of 24 hours from the time you get your paper or exam back, inform me in writing about your specific questions and claims about why you think you were incorrectly evaluated; 2) after I read your argument, we will meet and discuss it; 3) if our meeting did not produce a satisfactory result, inform me that you would like to dispute the score I gave you; 4) I will give the assignment to another professor in the department; whatever score he or she gives you is final, whether it is higher or lower than the original. I will not tell the second grader your original score, but I will give them access to the assignment sheet (and grading rubric).

Assignments

Research Paper

The major assignment of the semester requires you and a partner to think of a topic related to media bias and political behavior about which you are interested so that you can develop and answer a research question about that area. The topic you come up with must use content analysis as a research method (unless you have prior approval from me to do an experiment, survey, or interviews). First, you will develop a research question (one page) that gives both you and me an idea of what you are interested in studying. Then, I give feedback. Next, you will write a 5-7-page paper that reviews scholarly literature pertaining to your research question. More feedback. Then, you will explain how, exactly, you will conduct your analysis to answer your research question (3-5 pages). After more feedback from me, you will turn in the final product, a 15-20-page research paper that, in addition to the research question, literature review, and research design, will actually present your analysis that helps answer your research question. The paper will also briefly discuss the implications of your findings for the study of and knowledge about political communication. You will also present your paper to the class and receive feedback about the presentation from both a classmate and me. This kind of paper is an excellent writing sample for graduate school applications. More details to come...

Bias Identification and Fixing Bias Papers

These assignments require you to find a magazine-style “cover story” feature on a potential candidate in the 2016 presidential race. The first paper asks you to identify various forms of media bias we have examined during the semester and the second paper asks you to revise the article, correcting these mistakes.

Bias in Real Time

On one occasion during the semester, you and a partner will give a 10-minute presentation the shows the class a real-world example of some kind of bias we have dealt with in class. The example must have come from the previous five days.

Academic Dishonesty/Civilities

Integrity is important. Please take note of the university’s policy on academic misconduct: <http://students.wisc.edu/doso/acadintegrity.html>. If you have questions about how to properly cite a source, the quality of a particular source, and the like, I will help you with gusto and vigor. Any student caught plagiarizing or cheating will receive an F for the assignment and possibly the course. I reserve the right to report any incident to the Dean.

Since we are discussing politics in this class, it is possible that some emotions could run high. It is very important to treat everyone in class with dignity and respect. That does not mean that you have to accept every argument someone (including me!) makes, but it does mean that your response to that argument will not be personal and will be polite. While I am confident that this won’t be a problem, failure to follow these guidelines will impact your participation grade by 10% per inappropriate outburst. I won’t be using my cell phone to make calls or text during class. Neither will you. I won’t use my computer to surf the web during class or update my Facebook status or Twitter feed. Neither will you. If I break these rules, you can have my phone and my computer. If you break these rules, I can have your phone and/or laptop.

Some Advice

There are many positive strategies you can employ in order to leave this class with a strong understanding of the simultaneously symbiotic and antagonistic relationship between political actors, the media, and the public (not to mention a good grade). One of the most important is coming to office hours and Rathskeller hours. I want all of you to use this class to become alert and critical thinkers. I also would like to a little bit about you, what you are interested in, and what your goals are at UW and beyond. Coming to office hours/Rath hours to talk with me about the reading, the assignments, the exams, what you like about class, what you don't, and anything else are all great ways to maximize your experience here.

In addition, reading strategically will help you a great deal. Don't just skim each chapter as fast as you can and go watch *The Colbert Report*, stream the latest *Orange is the New Black* or binge watch last summer's *Mad Men* on Netflix. Read carefully, highlight the important points, and go over the main points again after you've finished reading the chapter. Go ahead and write in your book and reading packet. Make notes, ask or tweet questions and come to class ready to dazzle me with what you know and quiz me about what you didn't quite agree with or understand.

If you want to skip class, take a different one. A great deal of what you will learn at the University of Wisconsin won't come from a book, but from the lectures, multi-media examples, and discussions you experience in class. Skipping class will not teach you what you need to know about communication and opinion, even if you manage to pass the tests.

If you must miss for a legitimate reason, you must let me know before class in every imaginable circumstance. You have at least three ways to get ahold of me (email, office phone, Twitter). I am happy to work with you if you do this. If you have a personal condition that might result in your missing class or turning in assignments late, please alert me to it prior to **January 30th** so we can make any necessary adjustments to help you succeed.

Late Work

There are 30 of you and one of me and we only meet about 30 times during the entire semester. I advise you to turn in assignments on time and take exams on the day they are administered. **Late assignments are accepted at a penalty of 20 points per 24 hours, beginning the exact moment after I collect them in class.** The penalties only go to a total of 60 points, so if you are exceptionally late, it is still in your interest to hand in your late assignment and get some credit for your work. **If you miss an exam without permission, you get a 0.**

Course Schedule: Readings, Assignments, Exams

For each day, except the first day, be sure to have read the assigned reading for that class before you come!

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|-------------|---|
| January 21 | Welcome! |
| January 23 | Foundations of Journalism <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Barbie Zelizer, "Definitions of Journalism," Ch. 4 in Geneva Overholser and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, <i>The Press</i> (Oxford: Oxford University Press) |
| January 28 | Foundations of Journalism 2.0 <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Kovach & Rosenstiel, <i>The Elements of Journalism</i>, Chpts: 1-2.2. Schudson 2001. "The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism," <i>Journalism</i> 2(2): 149-170. |
| January 30 | Bias: A Short Overview <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Entman, Robert. 2007. "Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power," <i>Journal Of Communication</i> 57: 163-173. |
| February 4 | Ideological Bias: The Liberal Media <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Groseclose Tim and Jeffrey Milyo. 2005. "A Measure of Media Bias," <i>The Quarterly Journal of Economics</i> November (4): 1191-1237.2. Groseclose, Tim. 2011. <i>Left Turn: How Liberal Media Bias Distorts the American Mind</i>. New York: MacMillan. Selected pages |
| February 6 | Ideological Bias: The Liberal Media <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Groseclose, <i>Left Turn</i>, more selected pages2. Watts, Madrk D. David Domke, Dhavan V. Shah, David P. Fan. 1999. "Elite Cues and Media Bias in Presidential Campaigns: Explaining Public Perceptions of a Liberal Press," <i>Communication Research</i> 26 (2): 144-175. |
| February 11 | Ideological Bias: The Conservative Media |

1. Wagner, Michael W. and Timothy P. Collins 2014. "Does Ownership Matter? The Case of Rupert Murdoch's Purchase of the *Wall Street Journal*," *Journalism Practice*.
2. DellaVigna, Stefano and Ethan Kaplan. 2007. "The FOX News Effect: Media Bias and Voting," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* August (3): 1187-1234.

DUE: Research Question

February 13

Ideological Bias: The Conservative Media

1. Jamieson, Kathleen Hall, and Joseph N. Cappella. 2010. *Echo Chamber: Rush Limbaugh and the Conservative Media Establishment*. New York: Oxford University Press. Selected Pages
2. Nyhan, Brendan. 2012. "Does the US Media Have a Liberal Bias?" *Perspectives on Politics* 10 (3): 767-771.
3. Jamieson, Kathleen Hall. 2012. "Does the US Media Have a Liberal Bias?" *Perspectives on Politics* 10 (3): 783-785.

February 18

Professional Bias

1. Bennett, W.L. (1990). "Toward a Theory of Press-State Relations in the United States." *Journal of Communication* 40(2): 103–127.

February 20

Economic Bias

1. Hamilton, J. T. (2005). "The Market and the Media." In *Institutions of American Democracy: The Press*, G. Overholser & K. H. Jamieson (eds.), 351–371. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

DUE: Literature Review

February 25

Institutions, Government and Bias

1. Slotnick, Elliot E. and Jennifer A. Segal. 1998. *Television News and the Supreme Court: All the News that's Fit to Air?* Cambridge University Press.

February 27

Corporate Bias

1. McChesney, Robert W. 1999. *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times*, New York: University of Illinois Press.
2. Druckman, James N., and Michael Parkin. 2005. "The impact of media bias: How editorial slant affects voters." *Journal of Politics* 67 (4): 1030-1049.

DUE: Bias Identification and Fixing Paper

March 4

Bias or Spectacle?

1. Edelman, Murray. 1988. *Constructing the Political Spectacle*. Cambridge University Press.

March 6

Exam Review Jeopardy

March 11

Exam 1

March 13

Mid-Semester Check-in

SPRING BREAK

March 25

My Team of Journalists and Their Team of Journalists

1. Turner, Joel. 2007. "The Messenger Overwhelming the Message: Ideological Cues and Perceptions of Bias in Television News." *Political Behavior* 29: 441-64.
2. Iyengar, S. & Hahn, K.S. (2009). "Red Media, Blue Media: Evidence of Ideological Selectivity in Media Use." *Journal of Communication* 59(1): 19–39.

March 27

Do You See What I See? Selective Attention, Perception, and Interpretation of Media Coverage in the Mass Public

1. Mooney, C. "The Science of Why We Don't Believe Science," *Mother Jones*
2. Mutz, Diana C. "The Great Divide: Campaign Media in the American Mind," *Daedalus* 141(4): 83-97.

DUE: Research Design

April 1

Partisan Media and Its Consequences

1. Levendusky, Matthew. 2013. *How Partisan Media Polarize America*. 2013. University of Chicago Press. Selected Pages
2. Arceneaux, Kevin and Martin Johnson. 2013. *Changing Minds or Changing Channels? Partisan News in an Age of Choice*. University of Chicago Press. Selected Pages.

NO CLASS APRIL 3

April 8

Shrt Attn. Spans

1. Annie Lang, Mija Shin, Samuel Bradley, Zheng Wang, Seungjo Lee, and Deborah Potter. 2005. "Wait! Don't Turn That Dial! More Excitement to Come! The Effects of Story Length and Production Pacing in Local Television News on Channel Changing Behavior and Information Processing in a Free Choice Environment," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 49 (1): 3-22.
2. John Brockman, "A Big Question: 'How Is the Internet Changing the Way You Think?'" http://www.edge.org/q2010/q10_index.html

April 10

Our Implicit Biases

1. Valentino, Nicholas A., Vincent L. Hutchings, and Ismail K. White. 2002. "Cues That Matter: How Political Ads Prime Racial Attitudes During Campaigns." *American Political Science Review* 96 (1):75-90.
2. Winter, Nicholas J. G. 2010. "Masculine Republicans and Feminine Democrats: Gender and Americans' Explicit and Implicit Images of the Political Parties." *Political Behavior* 32 (4):587-618.

April 15

Solutions?

1. Nyhan, Brendan and Jason Reifler. Blank Slates or Closed Minds? The Role of Information Deficits and Identity Threat in the Prevalence of Misperceptions."
2. Ward, Stephen J.A. 2005. "Philosophical Foundations for Global Journalism Ethics," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 20(1): 3-21.

April 17	NO CLASS – Individual Conferences About Papers
April 22	Exam Review Jeopardy!
April 24	Exam 2
April 29	Epilogue: What Do We Know? What Don't We Know?
May 1	Presentations
May 6	Presentations
May 8	Presentations
May 12, 5:00pm	Final Paper Early Deadline (+2 points)
May 15, 5:00pm	Final Paper Absolute Deadline